

CITY OF SANTA ROSA  
BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD  
STAFF REPORT  
July 18, 2024

**SUBJECT**

Steele Lane Pilot Project Update

**ISSUE**

Staff will present a report on the Steele Lane Pilot Project.

**STAFF PRESENTER**

Alexander Oceguera, Active  
Transportation Planner

**RECOMMENDATION**

This item is for Board information and feedback on the existing pilot project as well as the Phase 2 Pilot Project.

**BACKGROUND**

On March 18, 2024, the City installed its first school safety pilot project on westbound Steele Lane between Rowe Drive and the Steele Lane Community Center. The pilot project along the frontage of Steele Lane Elementary School allowed the City to understand how more bus, bicycle, and pedestrian space in front of the elementary school may help students and parents access the school. The pilot project was intended to wrap up on May 24, 2024, however, citing a lack of incidents, City staff extended the study to maintain the safety improvement during Steele Lane Elementary's summer school session.

A public survey was open from May 1<sup>st</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup> in order to solicit feedback from the public relating to their experience during the pilot study. The survey was posted on the project webpage, advertised on City Connections, advertised through a partnership with the principal of Steele Lane Elementary School, and advertised through direct mailers to neighboring residents. Results of this survey can be seen in Attachment 1.

There are many benefits of "Road Diets" as published by the Federal Highway Administration with the United States Department of Transportation. Some benefits include:

- Slowing vehicle traffic enough to significantly reduce the rate and severity of collisions, especially for children.
- Reducing right-angle vehicle collisions due to motorists turning onto Steele Lane needing to cross 3 lanes of travel instead of 4 lanes of travel
- Shortening the crossing distance of active lanes for pedestrians.
- Providing more dedicated space for bicycles.
- Providing a more community-focused, complete-streets environment that better accommodates the needs of all road users.

**ANALYSIS**

City staff began continually monitoring the pilot project site, starting on March 18<sup>th</sup>, to

evaluate impacts for all modes of transportation. Observations included, but were not limited to, examining queueing lengths, general traffic flow, potential conflicts between modes, speeds, and overall perception. Observations were conducted at various times of the day and week, including peak times such as school drop-off/pick-up, the AM and PM peak commute, mid-day, and weekends.

City staff observed an initial issue with queuing which was found to be related to the pedestrian signal at the frontage of Steele Lane Elementary School. The timing of the cycle meant that, upon Crossing Guard activation of the pedestrian signal, the signal would immediately stop vehicle traffic regardless of the vehicle queue. City staff rectified this issue by increasing the wait time for the signal to be activated, thereby allowing more vehicles to funnel through the pilot project, reducing queue length. Staff observed that this change had a positive impact on pedestrians, specifically because the longer wait time for the pedestrians meant the number of children and parents ready to cross was higher, increasing a “strength in numbers” approach that made the crossing more visible, and therefore more comfortable.

A speed survey was conducted on Steele Lane between Salem Avenue and Berkeley Avenue. Speed survey results showed a 4% (1.6 MPH) decrease in speeds outside of school drop-off/pick-up and a 14% (5.4 MPH) decrease in speeds during school drop-off/pick-up.

Observations and survey results indicated that there was also an issue with westbound vehicles turning left off Steele Lane in the single lane section. When vehicles would stop to turn left waiting for a gap, the vehicles behind the stopped car would begin to queue, sometimes back nearly to Mendocino Avenue.

There were 167 responses to the public survey open from May 1<sup>st</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup> (see Attachment 1). Of the responses, 10% were teachers or parents of Steele Lane Elementary School children. When asked if the pilot project helped or hindered drop-off/pick-up for their children and/or students, the majority of responses were positive, stating that the slower traffic and additional space made it more comfortable and feel safer to navigate near the school as a pedestrian. Two responses were negative, stating that vehicle traffic moved too slowly.

When asked if the pilot project caused an alteration to commute patterns or leisure trips in any way, 67% said no. Of the 33% who said yes, the responses varied, stating that some respondents left home earlier than usual for work, avoided peak commute hours, or that they take detours to bypass the traffic. It should be noted that there have been no observations or complaints regarding an increase in vehicle traffic on neighborhood streets during the time of the pilot project.

When respondents were asked “Would you support a permanent traffic calming project being implemented in the Pilot Study area?”, the results show that 50% are in favor, 37% opposed, 11% were on the fence, and 2% left the question blank. Of those who opposed a permanent project, there were complaints related to various components of the pilot project. Some were based on lack of support for removing space for vehicles, opposing slower traffic patterns, and general lack of support. However, many of the “opposed” and “on the fence” responses cited specific reasons for their opposition/hesitancy and stated

that if their concerns were addressed, they may be open to a permanent solution. Some of the concerns included a short distance for merging, unclear signage, a lack of space for vehicles turning left off Steele Lane into neighboring streets, and a level of difficulty for neighboring streets turning left onto westbound Steele Lane.

City staff has concluded that the initial pilot project was a success because: it allowed for the observation of all modes of transportation, there were no significant negative adverse impacts, there is general favor of the project and its goals, and it was effective in increasing comfort for students, parents, teachers, and school administrators accessing Steele Lane Elementary School. While considered a general success, City staff recognize issues in the current design. The primary issue is the lack of dedicated space for left turns onto and off Steele Lane into and out of neighboring residential streets. A secondary issue is the lack of clarity in signage, making it potentially confusing for drivers to know when to merge and to know the “closed lane” is for school drop-off/pick-up only. A third issue is the lack of dedicated bicycle space, wherein bicycles must currently share the “closed lane” with the drop-off/pick-up traffic and the school buses. A fourth issue was that the Fire Department had to take oncoming traffic when responding to emergencies.

Considering these findings, City staff recommends implementation of a Steele Lane Phase 2 Pilot Project. This Phase 2 Pilot Project will build off the first pilot project but will address several of the issues explained above. The general changes to be made include, but are not limited to:

- Removal of one eastbound traffic lane between Service Court and Rowe Drive.
- Addition of a striped two-way left turn lane.
- Addition of signage that clarifies merging of lanes.
- Addition of a protected westbound bike lane.
- Instead of a loading zone where traffic flows freely westbound the loading zone will be coned off to eliminate through-traffic.

Preliminary Cross Sections can be seen in Attachment 2. The Cross Section drawings are not final and are currently undergoing inter-departmental review to finalize. All improvements made as part of the Phase 2 Pilot Project will be completed using paint and other materials that are able to be manipulated and responsive to conditions observed during the life of the pilot project, which is the same as the existing pilot project. Preliminarily, City staff anticipates the Phase 2 Pilot Project will begin before the next school year and continue for at least four months.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

This item is for Board information and feedback on the existing pilot project as well as the Phase 2 Pilot Project.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: Survey Results

Attachment 2: Steele Lane Phase 2 Pilot Project Cross Sections